



NEWS

Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas **L.A. County Board of Supervisors, 2nd District**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RIDLEY-THOMAS APPLAUDS L.A. COUNTY DPSS'S TOY LOAN PROGRAM'S OUTREACH TO UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Facing economic woes, use of the program has increased 33 percent in a year

LOS ANGELES -- Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas today praised the Department of Public and Social Services' Toy Loan Program and announced a partnership with the department to identify sites in underserved communities in the Second District during these financially-challenged times.

The Toy Loan Program is a free service which allows children to borrow a toy once a week from one of its designated Toy Loan Centers, in the same manner books is borrowed from public libraries. The program is a voluntary community effort sponsored in part by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and DPSS. It's is the oldest and most unique free-toy lending program in the United States.

"This type of program provides an opportunity for children to learn about values and responsibility," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. "At the same time, they will be able to enjoy playing with toys and books that they might otherwise not have access to."

The partnership, the Supervisor said, will include the April 30 opening of a new Toy Loan Center at the Mount Carmel Recreation Center in the Second District.

Over 30,000 children are served annually by the various services offered by the program. According to DPSS Director Phillip Browning, the department has witnessed a 33 percent increase in the number of children borrowing toys from the 51 countywide locations.

“I am pleased that we can continue to provide this critical service to the children of Los Angeles County. DPSS is committed to reaching out to families during this period of economic uncertainty,” Browning said.

While the program depends on monetary and toy donations from the public and private sectors, the County of L.A. provides a location for the program’s headquarters and a truck to collect and deliver toys. Toys are sorted, cleaned and repaired if necessary, at the headquarters, then distributed to the various centers. At any given time, there are approximately 45,000 toys in circulation and at the headquarters facility.

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BACKGROUND/HISTORY OF PROGRAM

In the summer of 1934, during the Great Depression, the manager of a dime store in southwest Los Angeles noticed two young boys wandering around his store, and discovered they were pocketing small toys and materials that could be used to construct toys. The boys were apprehended and referred to the Probation Department.

Probation staff then spoke to the principal of the school they attended and found that the boys had good records, but their families could not afford many toys. Together, the store manager, school principal, and Probation staff decided something must be done to prevent them from becoming delinquents, and the idea of gathering toys and loaning them to children was conceived.

The first Toy Loan Center opened May 6, 1935 in a garage near Manchester Park. The basic ground rules were developed. Toys would be loaned on a weekly basis, and a record would be kept of every toy borrowed. The children would be graded on the care of their borrowed toy, receiving a satisfactory mark for returning their toy on time and in good condition. After 20 good marks, s/he would attain the status of Honor Borrower, which entitled the child to a gift from the Honor Cabinet. In addition, the Toy Loan Honor Code was established to teach honesty, responsibility, courtesy, and integrity.

Today, 65 years after the first Toy Loan Center opened, the program remains virtually unchanged. There are still no membership dues and fines are not imposed for late returns. For a child to borrow toys, all that is required is a membership application card signed by a parent or responsible adult.

Individuals, groups, and a few toy manufacturers donate all the toys used by the program. The centers continue to be run independently by volunteers. They are located in parks or recreation facilities, children's centers, libraries, housing projects, community service buildings, and one in a homeless shelter. Each center is different from the others, but all adhere to the basic tenets.

Currently, the Toy Loan Program supplies toys to some 48 centers throughout LA County and is a resource for teachers, educators, school psychologists, and County personnel who borrow toys, books, and games to enhance learning and stimulate communication in therapy.

Almost from the beginning, the Toy Loan Program has been jointly operated with the Toy Loan Advisory Board – a non-profit organization, chartered by the State of California. It is comprised of private citizens who volunteer their time and energy by soliciting donations, operating toy lending centers, and assisting in administering the program. In addition the Board promotes Toy Loan and recommends general policies vital to the success of the program.

GRANT A WISH

Adopt-A-Family Program!

Bring joy to someone's life this holiday season and become a sponsor in the Department of Public and Social Services (DPSS) Adopt-A-Family program. Each year, this heartfelt and longstanding tradition continues to bring smiles to hundreds of needy families served by DPSS.

Los Angeles County staff, individuals, groups, community members, and local businesses can all participate in this joyous and gratifying event by sponsoring families. Sponsors are provided with the "adoptee's" contact information along with their "wish list" of requested items.

These items range from grocery items, clothing, gift certificates, or toy requests. The 'Spirit of Giving' is contagious and numerous volunteers who in past years have participated in this program have voiced this heartfelt sentiment. Volunteers so enjoy participating in the program that some gather together family, friends, and co-workers and hold "gift basket parties" where each person contributes items and their personal touch to the specially prepared holiday baskets. This activity is fun for the volunteers and a delight for the beneficiaries to receive!

The Adopt-A-Family program's continued success can be attributed to the hundreds of volunteers that see the program as a worthwhile endeavor and generously donate their time and gifts. Los Angeles is fortunate to have caring people sharing and bringing joy to those in need.

The Adopt-a-Family program is the gift that can be enjoyed and cherished year-round by the Adoptee and the Sponsor alike. If you, a group of co-workers, family members, or friends are looking to make a difference this Holiday Season, the Adopt-A-Family is the program for you. Choose to make a difference in someone's life this holiday season and keep the spirit of effective and caring service alive.